

As many strangers pass across the rangelands nowadays as the custom officers saw in the big days of Ellis Island. Diesel trucks manned by city drivers lay billows of caliche dust that hand in our valleys. Telephone lines are torn down; cotton tail rabbits are going to have to nest in trees to continue the species. Fossil fuel miners and their equipment are ruining the solitude of the Shortgrass Country.

Added to the invasion are the seismic exploration crews. These hombres are contract outfits that use large hydraulic powered weights to shake the earth, and that is intercepted by cables lined into a meter truck. Purpose of the work is to locate the high and low places underground. The theme of the work is to hire the wildest kids available to drive 13 trucks and pickups over everything from the grass to the gate posts. Specialties of the crews are stringing surveyor's ribbons in quantities normally associated with pennants flying from used car lots. However, they throw in other things such as truck races across the pastures and swimming parties during the critical hours when sheep and cattle water.

Money behind the explorers comes from the major oil companies. Surface damages are scaled from the depression era of the 1930s. Landowners and lessees are bid such royal offers as \$300 per mile to allow 13 or 14 six wheeled trucks to smash out a right-of-way that would make signs of General Sherman's march to the sea look like the trails that deer cut in a rain forest.

Permission to enter private land is gained by an innocuous sentence in oil and gas leases that permits the lessor to explore for oil and gas. It is after the lease is signed that the word "explore" takes on the meaning that it does. Explore to an oilman means "to deface, to spill, to burn with salt water, to deplete the earth with a caterpillar blade." The meaning broadens. In the end, four Dallas lawyers can't save the rancher.

Right at the time of this writing, a seismograph crew is working on the south end of the ranch. Their sponsor is close to being the largest oil company in the world. Right up in Washington, D.C., worthies are bellowing to high lung index and super piety about the thousands of dollars this vast corporation has spent to bribe sheiks in faraway lands and politicians from the ranks of constables on up to the chairman of presidential campaigns.

Yet, mind you, in all of their under table largesse, the treasury of the company has but \$300 a mile to pay my family for keeping our old ewes and old cows from watering.

So be it and so double be it. May my judge be merciful and forgive what I have said over the telephone. Give me back the peace of my youth. Return the days of my grandfathers. Let wagon wheels and shod horses cut the earth. Remove from the scene the diesel smoke and the carbon fumes of the compressors. Clear the air and send these crews to the heat of the war and desert of Angola.

Arbitration with the oil company over the damages didn't last long. I didn't realize that oilmen were so sensitive. All I told them was that the government sure wasn't going to pen a bribery rap on them for dealing in \$300 a mile figures.

I swear I didn't mean to be ugly. Nor was I being smart mouthed when I said their policy was eaten up with economy. I used that phrase on a bull salesman one time. He thought it was funny until he found out I was talking about his bulls.

There wasn't any cause to be so upset over the story I made up of "Two Bit Annie," the old gal who hoarded bread wrappers and tin cans. You know how I like to spin yarns. Perhaps I was a bit out of line for offering to allow them to name their first well after old Annie. Of course, as I said I wouldn't expect to be paid for the rights to the name even though I'm the one that wrote the story.

The biggest gasoline distributor in San Angelo predicts that gasoline will be short later in the summer. Well, the Volkswagon pilots and Cadillac jockeys can't blame the price of fuel on us. I am going to call for a rematch. Two Bit Annie would have had a lot of respect for those oil company boys.